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Town of Bristol, University Celebrate Initiatives Supported by Fund for Civic Activities

Nonprofits and community organizations join with Bristol and RWU officials to celebrate nearly \$200,000 in funds awarded to approximately 130 projects since 2007



November 18, 2015 | Public Affairs Staff

BRISTOL, R.I. – More than 60 people representing local nonprofits and community organizations gathered today at the Quinta-Gamelin Community Center in Bristol to join Town Administrator Antonio A. Teixeira, Roger Williams University President Donald J. Farish and members of the 12-person Town / University Cooperative Committee to celebrate the impact of the Fund for Civic Activities initiative, which has awarded nearly \$200,000 in University-provided grant funds to some 130 projects since 2007.

Since its launch, the FCA program has impacted thousands of Bristol residents – everyone from schoolchildren to seniors to local residents serving overseas on active military duty – by providing funds to dozens of organizations for community initiatives focused on the arts, social services, education, the environment and more. The FCA and its diverse collection of projects illustrate the University's commitment to fulfilling its core purpose – *to strengthen society through engaged teaching and learning* – with a particular emphasis on its host community.

“While we only recently articulated our innovative core purpose to strengthen society, that mission is rooted in a long-standing commitment at Roger Williams to working toward a greater good,” Farish said. “We are invested, now more than ever, in making a meaningful impact in Rhode Island and particularly in Bristol – which is not only our host community, but our home and a critical ingredient in the success of this University. We take great pride in serving as a good neighbor in Bristol, and it’s fulfilling to see the Fund for Civic Activities grants assisting as local organizations make a mark in the community.”

“The Fund for Civic Activities has assisted many organizations to either continue their missions or start new initiatives,” Teixeira said. “Roger Williams University has been a good partner in supporting town organizations.”

Art Night Bristol Warren – a monthly cultural event hosted in the neighboring towns from April to November and featuring new exhibits in museums and artists’ studios in an effort to engage local residents in the arts – was able to launch in 2012 with funding support received from the Fund for Civic Activities.

“The funds from our first FCA grant helped us get started and organized with Art Night,” said Stephan Brigidi, co-chair of Art Night Bristol Warren’s advisory board. “With that grant, we were able to cover some of our initial expenses including marketing and promotional materials, which were key for getting the word out and driving awareness for the program.”

Art Night now attracts thousands of visitors each year – including many East Bay residents – and additional FCA grant funds have enabled the program to expand from an exclusively visual arts showcase to a program that now features performing arts as well as culinary demonstrations and cooking workshops for families.

The Fund for Civic Activities program has awarded numerous grants to support local efforts to provide fresh produce and healthy meals for low-income families through organizations including the East Bay Food Pantry, Bristol Good Neighbors, the Magaziner Community Farm and the Friends of Saint Elizabeth Church group.

Similarly, the East Bay Cares program, an initiative led by the Bristol County Elks Lodge, has used grant money to help stock food pantries and soup kitchens in Bristol, Warren, Barrington and Portsmouth, when food supplies are low. The Elks also use the grants to support their educational programming including monthly workshops on how to shop for groceries and prepare healthy meals. Program Chair David Cioe believes the FCA grants serve an important role in helping the local East Bay community, especially at a time when donations to other charitable causes end up reallocated to national organizations.

“The grants we’ve been awarded from the Fund for Civic Activities have helped us feed *thousands* of families in need,” Cioe said. “The University is a large, well-known organization that could give grants to groups across the state or even the country – instead, RWU chooses to give to its community, and

the FCA grants are going directly toward families in the East Bay. That local commitment and impact is what I like most about the program.”

Educational programs funded through the [Bristol Warren Education Foundation](#), the [Herreshoff Marine Museum](#) and [Mosaico Community Development Corp.](#) as well as environmental initiatives with [Save the Bay](#), the [Mount Hope School](#) Sustainability Club and [Save Bristol Harbor](#) have also received funding through the program. In the [Bristol Warren Regional School District](#), FCA funds have supported causes like the Nature’s Classroom program at Kickemuit Middle School and the creation of a Discovery Garden at Guiteras School for lessons on nature, science and environmental awareness.

Grants have also funded hanging flower baskets on Hope Street, new technology equipment for public programs at the [Bristol Art Museum](#), furniture for the Humane Education Center at the [Bristol Animal Shelter](#), a new sound system for live music at the [Bristol Stone Church coffeehouse](#) as well as support for the refurbished courtyard at the [Rhode Island Veterans Home](#).

Even with its success to date, the FCA program represents just one key component of a valuable town/gown relationship. Together, Bristol and RWU have accomplished nearly a dozen joint community projects through the University’s Community Partnerships Center and have established opportunities for students to lead community service projects and complete internships with local businesses, among other collaborations.

The Fund for Civic Activities is part of the \$42 million, 20-year “memorandum of understanding” accord established by the University and Town in 2007, in which \$25,000 annually is awarded to local organizations and programs that enhance the civic experience of Bristol residents. Grant selections are made by the 12-person Cooperative Committee, which comprises individuals from both the Town and the University.